
Report on the 2021 ASN (Association for the Study of Nationalities)

Convention at the Columbia University in New York

The Association for the Study of Nationalities was held in a virtual format (5-8 May 2021). The panel “A Quarter of a Century of the Dayton Peace Accords: Success or Failure—or Both?” was chaired by Francine Friedman (Ball State University).

Stefano Bianchini (University of Bologna) titled his contribution, several months ago, “A New Phase of Destabilization: State Failure and Exchange of Territories.” This is so prescient because Slovenian Prime Minister Jansa’s alleged communication to the president of the European Council of a “non-paper” suggesting a way to continue the process of Yugoslav partition by introducing new border changes continues the discussion of the final disposition of the former Yugoslavia. The Prime Minister of Albania also saw the document before it was sent to Brussels, and the idea was shared with Hungarian and Macedonian elites, too. Therefore, this is obviously a document making the rounds of regional leaders. This idea of continuing partition of the former Yugoslav space is an old idea and could be extended, not only to Bosnia, but also Kosovo, Macedonia, even Montenegro. This raised the specter of the 1991 meetings (January 1991 Kucan-Milosevic that Slovenia peacefully leave Yugoslavia and March Tudjman-Milosevic in Karadjordeva to partition BiH), followed by EU discussions about how to partition BiH. There have also been discussions about territory exchange between Serbia and Kosovo, possibly reopening the possibility of Macedonia-Albanian reconfigurations. Only the borders between Montenegro and Kosovo have been ratified; all of the other border changes have not been ratified, even between Croatia and Slovenia. Despite the end of the war, these issues still are percolating and destabilizing the region. Had the EU accepted all of the successor states easily into the organization, the question of borders might not be so problematic or destabilizing. It is puzzling why the EU is not reacting more strongly against these questions of border changes, because it goes against all that the EU stands for. Also, why do the successor states appear not to be amenable to preventing the EU-set pattern for reconciliation

among themselves? And yet, the EU, too, is starting to—once again—give priority to the role of the nation-states. The weakness of the EU is parallel to the continuing debate about readjusting borders in Southeastern Europe. What can the US do, if anything? We continue to see the opposition between the forces of disintegration (of the former Yugoslavia's lands but also the EU) vs. those favoring the reintegration of the EU.

David Kanin (Johns Hopkins and Texas A&M) The conditions that exist in the region are still the same, not really changing over time. None of the borders south of the Sava are settled yet, nor can we yet be sure what the new post-Cold War security status quo will be, because that, too, is up in the air. However, as we greet the 26th anniversary of the Dayton Peace Accords (DPA), we must remember that the truce (for that is what it is) is still holding, because there is no war. But there is no reconciliation nor progress toward civic/democratic institutions among the constituent peoples that the DPA and the West promised. Thus, there is no war, but there is no peace either. While there is a continuation of trying to bring the worst perpetrators of crimes to justice, this does not work well with the goal of reconciliation, because the various communities treat each case of a member of its ethnicity, not as of individual justice but as if the entire national group is being judged, while the perpetrators of other ethnic groups are seen as monsters representing the other ethnic group. It is important to remember that the Bosnian Federation came first (in the Washington Agreement-Feb. 1994, folded into DPA) before the Bosnia and Herzegovina from the DPA in 1995. Bosnia, even with its constitution and institutions is not functional at the state or federation level (a "shot-gun marriage" between the Muslims and Croats); while the Republika Srpska is centralized and functional, it is not in the way the West would have liked. Thus, Bosnia itself is not really functional, even though this is the first time in its history since the 15th century that it is not part of an imperial or other type of overarching institution, such as Yugoslavia (interwar or Titoist). The question is, what is the economic basis for its existence? It would be one thing if Bosnia were invited into the EU. However, the EU's inability to either create a path into the EU or at least to discuss alternative relationships with Bosnia outside of the EU continues to corrode the region and the people's belief in their future in Europe. The recent "non-paper" mayhem just underlines this situation about the insecurity in the region and the lack of viability of the forms that have been created for governing there. The non-paper, and the reactions to it, are nothing new. A description of the outcome of what the non-paper discusses was "genocide." However, this demeans the term, which has now come to be a "badge of honor." Any community that is threatened or victimized calls

itself a victim of genocide; if that is denied, then the community has been doubly insulted. The dispute over this term is worrisome, as it could signal the possibility of further future violence. The current status quo depends on the stability and durability of whichever largest power is dominating at the time; now the EU, which dominates Europe, has no idea how to create a viable status quo for the area even though there is a rhetoric for the “path” to Europe. And the US under Biden is clearly a transitional, inertial administration with no new ideas. Thus, there is a feeling of permanent insecurity in the region. In the meantime, parochial, local concerns continue to dominate people’s minds.

Craig Nation (Dickinson College) gave a pessimistic view of the Balkan dilemmas, but they must be thought about in a larger context. The Dayton Peace Accords left many Bosnian issues unresolved; but also still unresolved are global challenges for which Bosnia serves as a microcosm of cascading global challenges and a lesson about how not to deal with them: for example, regression to a primitive integral nationalism; fragmented identity; failing to be able to identify themselves as a nation-states in the classical sense. Instead, there are fault lines still in place (micro-polities). The rationale for creation of Yugoslavia after World War I was to have a larger association, but, in the end, we again have identity politics. Twenty-six years after the DPA, we have more a ceasefire than conflict resolution. Yet, there is the illusion that Europe should have been able to manage it, which shows up as a paternalism that European ideas are superior—the European dream. We still don’t have a European integration resolution to post-Yugoslavia. Despite the “new nationalists” in Bonn, or Kachinsky, Jansa, etc., Europe is not able to create an institutional solution to Southeastern Europe. In fact, “the hour of Europe” is gone. Its weakness as a foreign policy actor reaches beyond Southeastern Europe. Thus, the Cyprus question remains unresolved, Ukraine, relations with Russia in general, all show the failed promise of European integration. Thus, these factors reach far beyond Southeastern Europe. Economic decline of the region parallels global trends, as do the collapse of populations, e.g., in Ukraine and the Balkans, too. There is an explosion of transnational crime; Southeast Europe is “the criminal gateway to Europe,” because these weak governments are vulnerable, which is a global challenge. There is a culture of retribution and punishment; it hasn’t ended the climate of impunity and introduced transitional justice. There is no truth and reconciliation, even though it should be done. Transitional justice, too, is a global issue. Most border issues are minor, but Macedonia has identity issues with its neighbors. Militarization of regional politics, e.g., NATO and strategic advantage, remains a problem. The US is preoccupied

with great power rivalry, and there are implications in the Balkans. Environmental degradation has a Balkan face (soil contamination, etc.) The region is a pawn in great power hands, because of a lack of an enduring geopolitical regional orientation, based on regional needs, not the needs of others. These are all world order issues.

James Gow (King's College) emphasized that the recent Jansa "non-paper" is truly a "non-starter." It is not in anybody's real interest, even the joining of Kosovo to Albania. Regarding the Dayton Peace Accords, looking at the title of this roundtable, we can say it is both a success and a failure, and it will remain so. The success is that it stopped a war, and it continues to stop it; any attempt to change the DPA will lead to conflict. Thus, sticking with something that is unsatisfactory may be all we can do. The Constitution was a recipe for inaction, because it was meant to forestall any decision that was not consensus-based—which would go against one of the involved communities. The elections right after the war were strategically necessary, not so much rushed, as people claim, because they cemented the truce. That took away the space for re-emergence of violence. Chris Bennett proposed creating a confederation, then reforming the election system so that anyone running for office has to have cross-community support. This might be a great idea, but now each community is stuck with preserving its own community's prerogatives. It is evident that BiH has no sense of political community; Al Simkus' work shows a decline of social trust after 1998; there is no closeness to the country in any of the ethnoreligious communities; there is no attachment to the political community formed by the boundaries of the state. There is no prospect of changing these borders. However, there have been some successes: Bosnian defense reform has been a great success (three armies became one), because all of the Bosnians took ownership of the process. Paddy Ashdown's tenure as High Representative was successful and made progress, although his successors haven't kept to that forward push. Perhaps there will be an opportunity in the future to reinvigorate that process. The Sarajevo canton has a cross-community opposition movement to take over governing, which is a sign of incipient progress. Gorazde is an example of economic and social cross-regional integration. The EU has a cumulative series of crises—migration, Brexit, Covid—which have set them back in their agenda, particularly accession in the Balkans. For example, accession of Serbia would mean that the RS must change (leading to greater cooperation within BiH?) Is the status quo viable? It must be, because there is no alternative. Long term projects still must be pursued with patience. For example, sovereign rights will still be recognized, as we

have seen with the Baltic states finally achieving true independence, the incorporation of East German areas successfully into a German whole, to mention only a few.

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